

From Turtle Island¹ to Palestine:

How Rehab Nazzal's Canada Park Resists Settler (Re)Creation

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*En s'appuyant sur le film *Canada Park* (2015) de l'artiste palestino-canadienne Rehab Nazzal, cet article interroge le dépeuplement violent des villages palestiniens d'Imwas, de Yalu et de Beit Nuba en 1967, ainsi que la construction ultérieure du « Ayalon Canada Park » au début des années 1970, financée par le Fonds national juif du Canada. Soulignant, chez Nazzal, l'usage de photographies d'archives et contemporaines, de contextualisations historiques, d'appels à la responsabilité internationale et de témoignages de personnes survivantes, les autrices relient l'artiste à un réseau de création autochtone : des artistes qui, de l'île de la Tortue à la Palestine, se tournent vers les médiums photographiques, et ce que les autrices décrivent comme les archives écologiques de la terre, pour contrer l'effacement colonial et les lieux de loisirs réservés aux colons.*

Wherever they went, Europeans immediately began to change the local habitat; their conscious aim was to transform territories into images of what they had left behind. This process was never-ending, as a huge number of plants, animals, and crops as well as building methods gradually turned the colony into a new place, complete with new diseases, environmental imbalances, and traumatic dislocations.

–Edward Said²

All structures and modes of containing humanity are challenged when thinking of the human in relation to the land.

–Wanda Nanibush³

INTRODUCTION

In the opening frames of her film *Canada Park* (2015), Palestinian-Canadian artist Rehab Nazzal situates viewers in an unsettling environment. As an indiscernible, siren-like whirring sound grows, grayscale archival images appear overlaid with the place name “IMWAS.” While the images fade to black, the sound continues. As we try to make sense of what we are hearing, another image appears – this time, of a dirt road, plants and a black square with white text that reads, “2,000 Stone Houses.” One by one, additional words appear and remain on the screen for a few seconds before they also fade to black: “Olive Trees,” “Mosques,” “Churches,” “Community Centres,” “Water Wells,” “Schools,” “Fruit Trees,” “Agricultural Associations,” “Olive Oil Mills,” “Cemeteries,” “Coffee Houses,” and “Roads.” Two colour images appear. The first zooms out slowly, revealing a park sign with a map and key, while the second zooms in, with the focus on the same sign's text / fig. 1/. Written in both English and Hebrew, the panel boldly acknowledges the park's name and funders:

THE VALLEY OF THE SPRINGS IN CANADA PARK
HAS BEEN DEVELOPED THROUGH THE GENEROSITY
OF JOSEPH & FAYE TANENBAUM
TORONTO, ONTARIO, CANADA
JEWISH NATIONAL FUND

To the right of the map, the descriptive headers on the key read: “LEGEND, ARCHAEOLOGY, PICTURESQUE SITES, SERVICES.” Beneath, a line adds “RECREATION AREA.”

Through this presentation of material in the opening scenes, Nazzal gestures to an environment that was once home to established Palestinian communities with vibrant cultural practices, networks of governance, education, and religion, and relationships with land now occupied by an “idyllic” nature park, providing visitors with space for leisure and relaxation. Featuring interviews, archival and contemporary photographs, survivors' testimonies, and historical contextualization, *Canada Park* is an eleven-minute documentary-style film that traces the violent displacement of Palestinians

and the razing of their villages—Yalu, Imwas, and Beit Nuba—by the Israeli Occupation Forces (IOF) on June 5, 1967, and the site's subsequent designation as an Israeli national park, Ayalon Canada Park, in the 1970s. This work is reminiscent of themes present throughout Nazzal's oeuvre, which “focuses on the effect of settler-colonial violence on people, on land and on other non-human life,”⁴ while also highlighting the resistance and emancipatory possibilities offered by these living beings. The film marks Nazzal's pivot from painting and drawing to lens-based media as a response to the disturbing realities she witnessed upon her return home to the West Bank in 2005, after twenty-five years of exile.⁵ As we will see, throughout her career, Nazzal's efforts to chronicle the impact of Israel's occupation of Palestine have been met with censorship and violence in both Palestine and Canada.⁶ However, Nazzal is one of many artists whose work uses living testimony to radically disrupt the colonial imaginary and the foundational Zionist myth of “a land without a people for a people without a land.”⁷

In the spring of 2023, we, the authors, saw *Canada Park* for the first time. As cultural workers based in so-called Canada, Nazzal's film reminds us of the interconnected experiences of Indigenous peoples across Turtle Island and Palestinians resisting ongoing settler-colonial projects. *Canada Park* also reminds us of the international nature of settler colonialism and how, at its foundation, it advances agendas grounded in white supremacy and environmental destruction in the name of resource acquisition and capital gain. Reflecting on our own relationships to these systems, as one mixed English and Anishinaabekwe and one English, Irish, and Ashkenazi settler guided by lived experiences of diaspora, displacement and colonization, Nazzal's work encouraged us to collaboratively reflect on the possibilities of an international approach to decolonial discourse within the field of art history.⁸ Of course, this consideration of internationalism is not new nor limited to relationships between humans, as Leanne Betasamosake Simpson reminds us that Indigenous peoples have always been immersed in an international network of relationships inclusive of “plant nations, animal nations, and the spiritual realm.”⁹ Additionally, these relationships are the result of extensive interspecies efforts spanning thousands of years, focused on cultivating ethics that prioritize “consent, reciprocity, respect [and] renewal.”¹⁰ These ideas are also reflected in the philosophy of tikkun olam (in Hebrew, the repair of the world) that is proliferated in contemporary Jewish thought as an ongoing and integral responsibility

1 In this article we use Turtle Island to refer to the lands known as “North America.” This is grounded in Morrisseau-Addison's Anishinaabe teachings, and the name is often used by other Indigenous nations across so-called North America to refer to these same lands. We recognize however, that not all Indigenous nations use “Turtle Island” to refer to these lands.

2 Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (Vintage Books, 1994), 225.

3 Wanda Nanibush, “About Land: Colonization, Whether in Canada or Palestine, Marks a Before and an After Where Identity is Radically Altered by Loss,” *Canadian Art* (Fall 2016), 106.

4 “Rehab Nazzal,” Mónica Reyes Gallery, accessed September 23, 2024, <https://www.monicareyesgallery.com/rehab-nazzal.html>.

5 After graduating from Damascus University, Nazzal was prohibited from returning home and continued to live in exile until she eventually immigrated to Canada, where she obtained a visa to return to Palestine. Rehab Nazzal, “Driving in Palestine by Rehab Nazzal,” The Polygon Gallery, August 20, 2023, YouTube video, 55:50, [6 Details of this censorship are described in Nazzal's article, “Critical Art and Censorship: Encounter of a Palestinian-Canadian Artist,” in *Other Places: Reflections on Media Arts in Canada*, ed. Deanna Bowen \(Media Arts Network of Ontario and Public](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XN9RBDOML-Nc&ab_channel=ThePolygonGallery; Leïla Ahouman, “Concordia Welcomes a New Horizon Postdoctoral Fellow in Studio Arts,” Concordia University, accessed November 30, 2024, https://www.concordia.ca/news/stories/2022/12/14/concordia-welcomes-a-new-horizon-postdoctoral-fellow-in-studio-arts.html.</p>
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Books Toronto, 2019), accessed September 16, 2024, <https://www.otherplaces.mano-ramo.ca/rehab-nazzal-critical-art-and-censorship-encounter-of-a-palestinian-canadian-artist/>. This source can be found archived at <https://web.archive.org/web/20240916063506/https://www.otherplaces.mano-ramo.ca/rehab-nazzal-critical-art-and-censorship-encounter-of-a-palestinian-canadian-artist/>.

7 This sentiment of “a land without a people for a people without a land” is located in writing by early Zionists such as Chaim Weizmann, the first president of “Israel.” Irus Braverman, “Planting the Promised Landscape: Zionism, Nature and Resistance in Israel/Palestine,” *Natural Resources Journal* 49 (Spring 2009): 340.

8 As writers with unique connections to the ideas shared throughout this paper, we will use variations of first- and third-person pronouns to distinguish between these. For example, we may use “our/their” to signal when an idea has both a personal and non-personal connection to us writers. This practice is inspired by Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang's approach to co-writing in their 2012 article “Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor,” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, no. 1 (2012): 1–40. We have adopted their use of combining forward slashes between specific pronouns to signal our respective connections to the content shared in this paper.

9 Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom Through Radical Resistance* (University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 56.

10 Simpson, *As We Have Always Done*, 57.



/fig. 1/ Rehab Nazzal, *Canada Park*, 2015. Film still. Courtesy of the artist.

for environmental and social repair. Together, Nazzal, along with our respective Anishinaabeg and Jewish knowledge systems, reminds us that we are not separate from this work. Therefore, to write this paper in a way that honours our/their teachings, we must do so while being mindful of our positionality in relation to one another and the ideas raised. This differs from Western/colonial methodologies often used in art history that attempt to position researchers as separate or disconnected from their research topic to establish objectivity.¹¹

As we write this essay, we are witnessing the horrific daily genocide against Palestinian life and lands as the Israeli government escalates their invasions across Gaza and the West Bank. Social media has become a tool for disseminating immediate, first-hand images, videos, and accounts produced by Palestinians on the ground. This documentation continues the over-seventy-seven-year outcry by Palestinians against Israel's occupation, calling on people around the world, including in the West, to examine their nations' relationship to the settler-colonial project operating in Palestine. In solidarity with Palestinians, mobilizations are taking place in Canada and across the world, calling on governments and institutions to endorse a military ceasefire and financial divestments from Israel.¹² Concurrently, we are also witnessing the suppression of students, artists, educators – and specifically Palestinian and Indigenous activists and cultural workers – who speak up against the ongoing genocide.¹³ Threats, enacted violence, and censorship increasingly endanger those in Palestine and Turtle Island who work to document and expose the extent of Israel's occupation and genocidal project.¹⁴

With this in mind, we wish to offer a deeper understanding of the history of the lands now marketed as Ayalon Canada Park, guided by the information presented in Nazzal's film, and understood through what we have come to describe as the land's ecological archives. We define ecological archives as human and non-human natural elements who retain a network of histories and stories through their continued connection and growth across time and space, despite settler-colonial attempts to uproot them. Lastly, we connect Nazzal's practice to the larger tradition of Palestinian and Indigenous art-making that counters colonial attempts at erasure. The mass expulsion of Palestinians and native plants from the land is genocide and ecocide. Yet, it is through the resiliency of the vegetation that has regrown in dense pine forests and razed villages, the presence of stone remnants standing in stark contrast to chain fences, and the human testimonies chronicled in Nazzal's documentary that the cracks in the colonial imagination are exposed.

THE ORIGINS OF CANADA PARK

In her film, Nazzal problematizes the establishment of Ayalon Canada Park and the Jewish-only colony of Mevo Horon that sit atop the remnants of the Palestinian villages Yalu, Imwas, and Beit Nuba, respectively. Throughout the film, monochrome archival images depicting the communities before and during the IOF's invasions are interlaced with contemporary images taken

11 Krista Ulujuk Zawadski, "Inuit Research Methodologies," in *Indigenous Art Histories in the United States and Canada*, ed. Heather Igloliorte and Carla Taunton (Routledge, 2023), 201.

12 "What is BDS?," BDSMovement, accessed September 23, 2023, <https://bdsmovement.net/call>. At the time of writing, a US-brokered ceasefire has been in effect since October 10, 2025, though Al-Jazeera reports that "two months on, Israel has violated the ceasefire more than 500 times, killing at least 356 Palestinians, and... fail[ing] to allow the entry of the amount of aid [Israel] agreed to." "Israel's Genocide in Gaza Has Not Stopped, Despite the Ceasefire: Analysts," Al-Jazeera, December 2, 2025, <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2025/12/2/israels-genocide-in-gaza-has-not-stopped-despite-ceasefire-analysts>.

13 Rana Nazzal and Alia Hijaab, "Art as a Mirror: How Canadian Institutions Are Complicit in Silencing Palestinian Voices,"

C Magazine (Fall 2024); Maya Pontone, "Questions Arise as Indigenous Curator Suddenly Departs Toronto Museum," *Hyperallergic*, November 23, 2023, <https://hyperallergic.com/857994/questions-arise-as-indigenous-curator-wanda-nanibush-suddenly-departs-toronto-art-gallery-of-ontario/>; "IJV Canada Salutes the Victories of Student-led Encampments Across Canada," Independent Jewish Voices Canada, June 4, 2024, <https://www.ijvcanada.org/ijv-canada-salutes-the-victories-of-student-led-encampments-across-canada/>.

14 The staggering number of journalist casualties in Gaza has been particularly shocking. "Journalist Casualties in the Israel-Gaza War," Committee to Protect Journalists, accessed November 9, 2024, <https://cpj.org/2024/10/journalist-casualties-in-the-israel-gaza-conflict/>.

by Nazzal. When these images are viewed alongside one another, elements of the once-intact villages become recognizable through their fragments – homes reduced to their foundations, broken stone walls, staircases that appear to lead nowhere, bridges and wells whose streams have run dry. Despite these seemingly vacant environments, life persists as cacti, olive trees, and other flora continue to bloom. White text appears on a black background, further explaining the invasions: “During the military occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, Israel’s Occupation Forces (IOF) forcibly expelled 10,000 Palestinians – residents of the ancient villages... Their houses were razed and their villages destroyed and declared a closed military zone.” Before 1948, Yalu, Imwas, and Beit Nuba spanned 31,544 donums (approximately 7,794 acres).¹⁵ Previously referred to as the Latrun Villages, the homeland of these communities is located atop the Latrun Salient, an area of the West Bank that extends out into occupied territory, and sits atop a road connecting Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. Considered a strategic outpost due to this location, the village sites were a main target for the IOF from 1948 to 1967 and were some of the first places targeted during the early hours of the Naksa (in Arabic, the setback) otherwise known as the “Six Day War.” From June 5 to 10, 1967, the Naksa was a culmination of longstanding tensions between Israel and neighbouring Egypt, Syria, and Jordan.¹⁶ These rapid events resulted in Israel expanding to four times its previous size, with control of the Sinai Peninsula, Golan Heights, the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, and Jerusalem, displacing over 300,000 Palestinians.¹⁷

At the heart of Nazzal’s film is the inclusion of testimony from survivors and soldiers who were present during the IOF’s invasions of Yalu, Imwas, and Beit Nuba. Through these statements, not only are Israel’s justifications refuted but personal experiences offer viewers a nuanced awareness of what these lands mean to the previous inhabitants. Nazzal includes a report from a former IOF soldier, Amos Kenan, describing how the destruction of the three villages was “for reasons of strategy, tactics, and security.” A 1991 article includes a longer version of Kenan’s statement, explaining how justifications from Israeli officials differ from the reality he witnessed on the ground. While Israeli officials claimed that the villages had already experienced significant destruction from previous wars and that there were no civilians present,¹⁸ Kenan contests, stating how “in the houses we found one wounded Egyptian commando officer, and some very old people. At noon the first bulldozers arrived...”¹⁹ Later in the film, a Palestinian man named Hisham Abu Goush shares memories from his childhood in Imwas and recounts the violent displacement of his family and neighbours in 1967:

They ordered everyone to evacuate their homes for a ‘house-search’[...] they forced them out of the village and prevented them from returning, even for their belongings. They walked on foot through a number of villages, from Imwas to Ramallah [...] Fourteen people were killed under the rubble of their homes, one of the killed was a physically disabled elderly man who I knew personally and several elderly women who could not get out, their homes were demolished with them still inside.

15 Salman H. Abu-Sitta and Palestine Land Society, *Atlas of Palestine, 1917-1966* (London: Palestine Land Society, 2010), 35.

16 The Naksa includes a much larger context and series of events that exceeds the scope of this paper. For a more comprehensive overview, we refer readers to Roland Popp, “Stumbling Decidedly into the Six-Day War,” *The Middle East Journal* 60, no. 2 (Spring 2006): 281-309.

17 Abu-Sitta and Palestine Land Society, *Atlas of Palestine*, 100; Manar H. Makhoul, “Dispossession and Discontinuity: The Impact

of the 1967 War on Palestinian Thought,” *Critical Inquiry* 48, no. 3 (2022): 552.

18 “Canada Park - Park with No Peace Was Aired by Canada’s CBC Network,” *Assopace Palestina*, February 5, 2021, Youtube video, 29:00, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OmK2ZbTCb7s>.

19 John Dirlik, “‘Canada Park’ Built on Ruins of Palestinian Villages,” *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs* 10, no. 4 (October 1, 1991): 34.

Another survivor, Dr. Ismail Zayid, is also recorded, sharing a similar testimony:

In the course of the Israeli army's occupation and destruction of my village... Eighteen people died under the rubble of their demolished homes because they were too old or disabled to get out of their houses in time, before the Israeli explosives were effected to destroy the houses... One of those killed was Mohammad Ali Bakr, an uncle of my mother.

Returning to Abu Goush, he also reveals that his attempt to obtain a permit to return to the site in 1996 was denied by the Israeli state. Notwithstanding this official refusal, he decided to visit that year anyway, during which time he recognized the cyprus tree and cave where his family used to sit and eat lunch near his home, as well as the cemetery, the religious sites, and the cacti that grew between homes. Abu Goush's testimony supports what the images and text communicate, that deep connections between Palestinian inhabitants and the land remain despite the superimposition of Ayalon Canada Park and the colonial narrative that made its establishment possible. Additionally, recording these first-person accounts, Nazzal preserves crucial oral histories which will continue to be carried and referenced into the future.

Later in the film it is revealed who is responsible for the settlement and Ayalon Canada Park's construction: "In 1970, the Israeli occupation authorities established an illegal Jewish-only colony over the ruins of Beit Nuba. In 1975, the Jewish National Fund of Canada (a registered charity) established 'Canada Park' over the ruins of Imwas and Yalu." The image shifts and we are met with a close up of a plaque embedded in a sand-beige stone wall, eerily reminiscent of the remnants of stone houses that scatter the park grounds, bearing a message in both English and Hebrew:

JEWISH NATIONAL FUND
THIS PARK WAS CONCEIVED BY
BERNARD M. BLOOMFIELD
AND BUILT DURING HIS TERM OF OFFICE
AS PRESIDENT OF JEWISH NATIONAL FUND OF CANADA
1971-1975

Founded in 1901 by Theodor Herzl, commonly referred to as the "father" of modern political Zionism, Keren Kayemeth L'Yisrael or the Jewish National Fund (henceforth referred to as JNF) continues to be a prominent participant in the displacement of Palestinians and seizure of their land.²⁰ Since its establishment, the JNF has grown into an international organization with divisions based in cities and countries around the world that collect substantial financial donations from both individuals and governments alike. While the organization frames its initiatives as environmental and commemorative,²¹ as one of the largest landowners in Israel, the JNF's mission is principally to "acquire land in Israel for Jewish settlement."²² As Nazzal highlights in her documentary, the Canadian branch of JNF was founded in 1968 as an independent charity, which was funded and maintained by Canadian tax dollars until the JNF's status was officially revoked by the Canadian Revenue Agency on August 10, 2024.²³

20 "Our History," JNF Canada, accessed June 24, 2024, <https://jnf.ca/history.asp>; Braverman, "Planting the Promised Landscape," 327.

21 Jewish National Fund-USA Editors, "Why Plant Trees in Israel?," [jnf.org](https://www.jnf.org/blog/environment/why-plant-trees-in-israel), accessed July 31, 2024, <https://www.jnf.org/blog/environment/why-plant-trees-in-israel>.

22 "Our History." Since re-accessing this webpage in October 2025, this line has been removed, but the original quote remains visible through archived snapshots of the page: <https://web.archive.org/web/20240723135650/https://jnf.ca/history.asp>.

23 Many people and groups have called into question JNF-Canada's status as a charitable organization in Canada, including Dr. Ismail Zayid, who has long pressured the Canadian Revenue Agency to revoke their charitable status. "Our History"; Canada Gazette, "Canada Revenue Agency," *Canada Gazette Part 1* 158, no. 32 (August 10, 2024): 2759, accessed September 22, 2024, <https://gazette.gc.ca/rp-pr/p1/2024/2024-08-10/pdf/g1-15832.pdf>

The timing of JNF Canada's establishment and charitable registration aligns with a range of North American Jewish institutions whose financial, social, and political investment in Israel grew following the Naksa. As sociologist Sheryl Nestel explains, the events of the Naksa sparked widespread sympathies and urgency from the global Jewish community to maintain Israel's existence as a "safe haven" for Jewish people, as the threat of its destruction became bound to our/their recent memories of the devastating and generationally life-altering events of the Shoah.²⁴ Nestel goes on to explain how, for North American Jewish communities especially, Zionism united this fear of Jewish persecution with "the necessity of Jewish emotional, political and financial support for the Israeli state, while rendering non- or anti-Zionism an unspoken heresy."²⁵ Moreover, Joseph Tanenbaum's foundation, the principal funder of Ayalon Canada Park, also received charitable status with the CRA in 1967.²⁶ Crediting both Joseph and Faye Tanenbaum, an article published in the *Canadian Jewish News* on December 15, 1972, unpacks their involvement and the plan for a substantial area of the park to be named the "Joseph and Faye Tanenbaum Recreational Complex." The then-President of JNF Toronto, Charles Kent, is documented as boasting that the "facilities would include playing fields, botanical gardens, foresters' lookouts, [and] cycling pathways."²⁷ The fifteen-million-dollar project, which also included financial sponsorships from the central governance of KKL-JNF and the Land Authority of Israel, was further described by Kent as a space to provide Israelis with "the recreational facilities denied [to] them so long because of defense priorities."²⁸

Framing Ayalon Canada Park as solely a nature conservation site for recreation and leisure, while erasing the site's history of persecution, camouflages the genocidal dispossessions inherent in its establishment, which, to date, prevent the villages' inhabitants from returning to their land.²⁹ In *Canada Park*, Nazzal's compilation of firsthand accounts, images of the villages prior to, during, and after their destruction, and her contextual framing of these events, subvert the discourse of divine right and self-defence often employed by the state of Israel and its international supporters to condone the use of military force and environmental transfiguration. In this vein, many of the JNF's initiatives are presented with the primary purpose of acquiring land for agriculture and/or leisure. With these tree-planting endeavours, which can perhaps be referred to as the physical act of "putting down roots," the JNF's ongoing mission seeks to fabricate relationships between Israelis and the land. As professor of Arabic Culture and Literature Carol Bardenstein explains:

Not only do tree-planting and the afforestation campaign create [Zionist] memory... but they also served to *erase* memory, by erasing or planting over traces of places in Palestinian collective memory. A number of the several hundred Palestinian villages that were destroyed between 1947 and 1949 have had JNF trees and forests planted over their remains, in a further reshaping and reconfiguration of these sites.³⁰

24 The Hebrew word "Shoah" translates to "catastrophe" and is often used to refer to the attempts by the German Nazi Regime to eradicate the Jewish population during and before the Second World War. USC Shoah Foundation, accessed October 10, 2025, <https://sfi.usc.edu/content/what-shoah>.

25 Sheryl Nestel, "Zionist Loyalty and Euro-Jewish Whiteness: Untangling the Threads of Lethal Complicity," in *Advocating for Palestine in Canada*, ed. Emily Regan Wills, Jeremy Wildeman, Michael Bueckert, and Nadia Abu-Zahra (Fernwood Publishing, 2022), 49.

26 "The Joseph Tanenbaum Charitable Foundation - Quickview," CRA, accessed October 10, 2025, <https://apps.cra-arc.gc.ca/ebci/hacc/srch/pub/dsplyRprtngPrd?q.srchNmFltr=joseph+tanenbaum+foundation&qstts=0007&selectedCharityBn=108085564RR0001&dsrdPg=1>.

27 Gary Laforet, "Canadians to Build Park in Israel Near Tel Aviv," *The Canadian Jewish News*, December 15, 1972, <https://newspapers.lib.sfu.ca/cjn2-36405/page-6>.

28 Laforet, "Canadians to Build Park in Israel Near Tel Aviv."

29 The JNF brochure promoting Canada Park in this article does not show any record of the three villages destroyed in 1967. Dirlik, "Canada Park' Built on Ruins of Palestinian Villages," 34

30 Carol Bardenstein, "Threads of Memory and Discourses of Rootedness: Of Trees, Oranges and the Prickly-Pear Cactus in Israel/Palestine," *Edebiyât*, no. 8 (1998): 8. For readers who wish for a deeper analysis, this point is further elaborated in Bardenstein's chapter "Trees, Forests, and the Shaping of Palestinian and Israeli Collective Memory," in *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present*, ed. Mieke Bal, Jonathan Crewe, and Leo Spitzer (University of New England, 1999).

This point is further elaborated by researcher and licensed tour guide Noga Kadman in 2009, who found that, of the 418 villages destroyed in 1948, 182 are now encompassed by parks, forests, or nature reserves, with 86 of these forests planted specifically by the JNF.³¹

At the time of writing this paper, the JNF still boasts of its involvement in the construction of over 1,000 parks across occupied Palestine, with 175 of these projects undertaken by JNF Canada from 2007 to 2017.³² JNF Canada's 2021 report celebrates the planting of nearly two million trees since 2000.³³ While planted species include eucalyptus, olive, and fig trees, it is the pine tree that has become most synonymous with their mission, with Aleppo and Brutia pines being their most commonly planted species.³⁴ Legal scholar Irus Braverman elaborates that the planting of these pine trees has been strategically used elsewhere in Palestine for two main reasons. Firstly, these select pine tree variants have been proven to establish themselves quickly and grow at a rapid pace, causing botanists to refer to them as a "pioneer species" due to their ability to prepare soil for a greater variety of plant species.³⁵ It is interesting to note, however, that prior to the twentieth century, Aleppo pines were typically found distributed throughout the western Mediterranean region, including parts of North Africa and the southern areas of Spain, France, and Italy. The pines themselves were rarely found as part of Palestine's local flora prior to the twentieth century, except for on select parts of Jabal al-Karmil and western al-Jalil—known in Hebrew as "Mount Carmel" and "Galilee," respectively.³⁶ Their existence as one of the most common plant species in Palestine can therefore be directly attributed to these tree-planting efforts. Secondly, it is speculated that the popular use of pine trees was due to their ability to reflect a seemingly distinct "European-type landscape."³⁷ Braverman further explores the ideological and nostalgic foundations of this phenomenon:

Although it was intended to work toward negating the image of the exilic European Jew, the reconstitution of the Jewish homeland in Palestine and the project of putting down roots in this new place through the Zionist afforestation project, nonetheless, reaffirms the old European identity precisely by its linking one homeland to another. This is established through the visual treespacing of Israel with monocultural pine forests, as though it were Europe.³⁸

Quoted at the beginning of this paper, Edward Said likewise shares how geographic transfiguration is a pervading facet of European settler colonialism, whereby the land is reshaped to resemble that which settlers had "left behind." Characterized as an ongoing process, uprooting and planting thus play a central role in these nation-building projects.

A further look at the JNF's visual propaganda campaigns reveal messages that work to encourage monetary and ideological support for their tree-planting and agricultural-development programs. These fundraising and educational campaigns, typically directed towards Jewish youth around

31 Braverman, "Planting the Promised Landscape," 350.

32 "Jewish National Fund - Plant Trees in Israel," jnf.org, accessed July 1, 2024, <https://web.archive.org/web/20080806130644/http://www.jnf.org/site/PageServer?pagename=history>; IJV Canada, "Canadians Are Subsidizing the Dispossession of Palestinians - Help Us Put an End to This!," June 9, 2017, YouTube video, 4:10, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8hldal8iPv8&t=1s&ab_channel=JewishVoices.

33 JNF Canada, "JNF Canada Impact Report 2021."

34 Braverman, "Planting the Promised Landscape," 342.

35 This information was gathered from an interview that Braverman conducted with Suhail Zeidan, the Director of JNF National Forests, Orchards, and Grazing on December 18, 2005; Braverman, "Planting the Promised Landscape," 343; Nili Liphshitz and Gideon Biger, "Past Distribution of Aleppo pine

(*Pinus halepensis*) in the Mountains of Israel (Palestine)," *The Holocene* 11, no. 4 (2011): 427.

36 Liphshitz and Biger, "Past Distribution of Aleppo pine (*Pinus halepensis*) in the Mountains of Israel (Palestine)," 428.

37 Braverman, "Planting the Promised Landscape," 343.

38 Braverman, "Planting the Promised Landscape," 343. We share this discussion of "European-looking landscapes" with an understanding that Jewish Israeli populations include but are not limited to Ashkenazi, Sephardic, and Mizrahi communities. Still, it is important to note that the JNF and its afforestation campaigns were primarily established and developed by Zionists who heralded from Eastern and Central Europe.

the world, are rooted in the Zionist notion of “making the desert bloom.”³⁹ Present in early and contemporary JNF literature, this phrase frames Jewish subjects as the “ideal and rightful keepers and cultivators of the land, linked to a primordial past,” and relies on claims that the land was “barren,” “desolate,” and “mistreated” by its Palestinian inhabitants prior to settlers’ return and “rescue” of the landscape.⁴⁰ One poster created for the JNF in 1950 by the British graphic designer Abram Games, for instance, features an illustration of a green fist breaking through the ground clutching a pink rose that faces up towards the sky, with accompanying text that reads, in both English and Hebrew, “The Conquest of the Desert.”⁴¹ Above the rose is a quote, written in English, excerpted from the book of Isaiah: “and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose,” effectively advocating for the afforestation and conquering of the supposed desert “wasteland.” The use of the English language also functions here as a tool of global reach. Moreover, as Braverman and Bardenstein both note, through linking their activities to this “primordial past,” affirmed by biblical and rabbinic references, “tree-planting in the Zionist present... has reshaped the timeline of Jewish collective memory from one of open-ended exile after dispersion, to a completed cycle ending in return,”⁴² attempting to fill in for centuries of little Jewish presence and connection to the land.

Another poster, commissioned by the JNF in 1955 by an unidentified artist, borrows a second line from the book of Isaiah, stating, “for as the days of a tree are the days of my people.”⁴³ Boldly outlined in the center of the image is Israel’s occupied territory, floating next to a large tree that stands out amongst the landscape, with the words “Tree Fund” emblazoned across its leaves. Promoting JNF’s tree-planting initiatives entirely in English, the poster directly addresses Jewish people living in diaspora. Using tree planting as a means of creating a distinct Jewish collective identity, with the poster’s pictorial and textual references appearing to intertwine the existence and vitality of Jewish people everywhere with the planting of trees in Palestine. As Braverman has similarly observed, “indeed, the tree’s physical presence stands in for the Jewish presence. It replaces the void of the Jewish body, situated far away in the diaspora, with the body of the tree, as firmly rooted as a thing can be in the soil of the Holy Land.”⁴⁴

By physically implanting these layers of connection between the Jewish body and the planted tree, the JNF solidifies its mission of naturalizing the Jewish subject in Palestine, which consequently relies on the denaturalization of Palestinian presence and connection from the land.⁴⁵

Such propaganda serves to legitimize land theft and the erasure of Palestinian inhabitants whom early Zionists considered to be both absent and, contradictorily, detrimental to the landscape. Herzl propagated this sentiment in his 1898 text “Zionism,” where he describes that “at present the land is poor and neglected: the slopes of the hills bare, the places with famous names are sad piles of debris and the fields lie fallow. The Holy Land is a wilderness.

39 Braverman, “Planting the Promised Landscape,” 340; Tariq Dana and Ali Jarbawi, “A Century of Settler Colonialism in Palestine: Zionism’s Entangled Project,” *The Brown Journal of World Affairs* 24, no. 1 (2017), 199.

40 Bardenstein, “Trees, Forests, and the Shaping of Palestinian and Israeli Collective Memory,” 158.

41 The Palestine Poster Project Archive maintains an abundant record of JNF propaganda posters dating from 1920 to the present day: <https://www.palestineposterproject.org/special-collection/jewish-national-fund>. See “Blossom As the Rose,” The Palestine Poster Project Archives, accessed October 13, 2025, <https://www.palestineposterproject.org/posters/blossom-rose>.

42 Bardenstein, “Trees, Forests, and the Shaping of Palestinian and Israeli Collective Memory,” 158; see also Braverman, “Planting the Promised Landscape,” 331.

43 “For as the Days of a Tree Are the Days of My People,” The Palestine Poster Project Archives, accessed October 13, 2025, <https://www.palestineposterproject.org/posters/days-tree-are-days-my-people>.

44 An interview with JNF’s former Chief Inspector, Amikam Riklin, adds that “initially, tree planting was not perceived as an ecological practice but rather as a way to physically freeze undeveloped land for future Jewish development.” Braverman, “Planting the Promised Landscape,” 326–27, 347.

45 For further information, please refer to Joanna Claire Long, “(En)planting Israel: Jewish National Fund Forestry and the Naturalisation of Zionism” (MA Thesis, University of British Columbia, 2005).



/fig. 2/ Rehab Nazzal, *Canada Park*, 2015. Film still. Courtesy of the artist.

But there are oases—our Jewish settlements!”⁴⁶ Additional founding Zionist perspectives also argue that under the stewardship of Palestinians “the land had been ‘neglected for centuries,’ ‘ruthlessly exploited,’ and allowed to fall into a state of ‘barren,’ ‘godforsaken wilderness’ from which it now needed to be rescued,”⁴⁷ only able to be carried out by the land’s chosen and “authentic people.”⁴⁸ In reality, the cacti, olive trees, and other native flora obscured in attacks, like the ones outlined in *Canada Park*, substantiate long histories of cultivation that are deeply rooted in Palestinian culture. Nazzal’s article “Reflections: The Olive Tree and the Palestinian Struggle against Settler-Colonialism,” for example, outlines how olive tree growth in Palestine can be traced to 11,000 and 7,000 BC, with the oldest olive tree in existence found in Al Walaji village.⁴⁹ Called by the name Al-Badawi (the Nomad), experts believe the species to be over 4,000 years old.⁵⁰ Paradoxically, it is through imagery of green landscapes and ecological prosperity that the JNF’s posters intend to erase the relationships that Palestinians have cultivated with the land, relationships that predate both the JNF and the existence of the State of Israel. Still, despite attempts at uprooting, the flora that grows in Ayalon Canada Park, whether it be cacti, olive trees, or pine trees, are active participants in this ecosystem, witnessing and responding to the violence enacted on the land and its people.

CONSULTING THE ECOLOGICAL ARCHIVES

The destruction of Imwas, Yalu, and Beit Nuba and the subsequent planting of Ayalon Canada Park speaks to how the Zionist project views land as a non-sentient object on which the desires of settlers can be imprinted. However, as Nazzal’s *Canada Park* proposes, in addition to the people who carry oral and written testimony, it is also the ecosystem that resists Israel’s construction by recording and transmitting knowledge. Earlier, we defined this practice as an ecological archive that acknowledges natural elements as animate beings who participate in dynamic environments alongside humans and other, non-human species. Cacti, for example, are featured throughout *Canada Park*, demonstrating their steadfastness and evocative abilities. In the first image of cacti, a subtitle explains that “the Palestinian sabr (cactus) is known for its persistence and resilience to uprooting” / fig. 2 / . The image also depicts an abundance of cacti growing over a stone barrier, recalling Abu Goush’s childhood memories that were revived upon his return to Imwas. As Palestinian-American anthropologist Nasser Abufarha explains, the sabr is a prominent plant that, prior to 1948, “was a dominant feature of the landscape of historic Palestine.”⁵¹ Not only do these cacti demarcate community orchards and groves, they also offer sweet fruits that were shared across the village. For Palestinians, the deep relationships they build with the sabr reveal characteristics that they see in themselves. This can be seen in the root of the word sabr itself, which “in Arabic means ‘patience.’”⁵² The recognition of plants as animate beings is a foundation of many Indigenous knowledge systems across the world and has been discussed widely in scholarship informed by these Indigenous worldviews. For Anishinaabe, one of the areas we/they express this animacy is in our language.

46 Theodor Herzl, *Zionist Writings*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Herzl Press, 1973), 120; quoted in Uri Eisenzweig, “An Imaginary Territory: The Problematic of Space in Zionist Discourse,” *Dialectical Anthropology* 5, no. 4 (1981): 282.

47 Long, “(En)planting Israel,” 16. This quotation is Long’s conclusion of her discussion “Zionist conceptions of nature” that summarizes statements made by early Zionists including Joseph Weitz, former Director of the JNF’s Land and Afforestation Department, and C.R. Conder, a British army officer involved in Britain’s Palestine Exploration Fund. Further Zionist characterizations of Palestinians are discussed in Edward Said, *The Question of Palestine* (Times Books, 1979), 78–82.

48 Braverman, “Planting the Promised Landscape,” 335.

49 Rehab Nazzal, “Reflections: The Olive Tree and the Palestinian Struggle against Settler-Colonialism,” *A Journal of Canadian Literary and Cultural Studies* 8 (2019): 89.

50 Nazzal, “Reflections,” 89.

51 Nasser Abufarha, “Land of Symbols: Cactus, Poppies, Orange and Olive Trees in Palestine,” *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power* 15, no. 3 (June 2008): 346.

52 Abufarha, “Land of Symbols,” 347.

While English often only attributes animacy to humans, Anishinaabemowin considers the spirit of a being, referring to whether it is animate or inanimate.⁵³ This knowledge is the result of long-cultivated relationships, where Indigenous peoples and non-humans have learned to communicate through multi-sensorial modes, culminating in numerous agreements “designed to generate...the life of all living things.”⁵⁴ This challenges romanticized misconceptions that situate Indigenous relationships with the land as inherent or magical. Recognizing plants in this way establishes relationships between humans and non-humans that are based in care, agency, and reciprocity rather than exploitation and commodification.

Recognizing the sabr as active knowledge carriers, Nazzal continuously focuses on them and native plants more widely, both in *Canada Park* and in her photographic series *We the Wild Plants and Fruit Trees* (2022). In the latter, Nazzal gathered sixty images of various flora and the remains of stone infrastructure present in what is now referred to as Mei Naftoah Nature Reserve, situated atop the remnants of Lifta, another Palestinian village that was forcibly depopulated in 1948.⁵⁵ Like the contemporary imagery in *Canada Park*, the photographs document colourful flowers, lush green trees and bushes, as well as the remains of stone buildings, barbed-wire fences and park signs declaring the park rules in English, Arabic, and Hebrew. In one image, a park sign states that the eight-hectare “reserve encompasses a streambed and spring and the cemetery of the Arab village that once stood here” / fig. 3 / . At the bottom, ten icons illustrate the park’s rules: no camping, no swimming, and no picking the flora. In a 2023 artist talk, Nazzal highlighted how these rules directly prevent Palestinians from cultivating relationships with the land through harvesting plants for “food, spiritual nourishment and medicine.”⁵⁶ In another image from this series, an almond tree grows from the roof of a stone building, its facade still mostly intact but bending as a result of the tree’s expansive root system / fig. 4 / . Almonds ripen amongst the green leaves, but for whom will these fruits provide nourishment? In this work, Nazzal becomes a translator for the native plants:

We—fig, olive, pomegranate, tout, cactus, za’atar, meriamiyeh, khu-beze, kubbar, aqoub, louf, baqleh, khurfesh, khardal, kurreis—are integral to the well-being of the Earth and its inhabitants... Instead of being valued for our inherent worth and the crucial role we play in sustaining life, we are often seen as mere objects to be exploited for profit.⁵⁷

Focusing on the acts of refusal and determination carried out by the native species, Nazzal offers what Anishinaabe writer and curator Wanda Nanibush has referred to as an “ethics of image-making.”⁵⁸ For Nanibush, this approach emerged during a visit to Lifta in 2016 that was organized by Nazzal. As fellow travelers documented sites of loss and trauma, Nanibush was overcome by a feeling of discomfort and instead chose to focus on photographing the plants. While doing so, another artist pointed out the “surprising survival” of pomegranate, fig, and olive trees, inspiring Nanibush to recognize these environments as “sites of resistance.”⁵⁹ Through offering another way of looking at flora, Nanibush gestures towards a holistic archive from which future generations can learn.

53 Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants* (Milkweed Editions, 2013), 53–56.

54 Simpson, *As We Have Always Done*, 3.

55 Rehab Nazzal, “Moving the Landscape to Find Ground: Artist Talk with Rehab Nazzal,” 4TH Space Concordia University, February 7, 2023, YouTube video, 1:42:21, <https://www.youtube.com/watch>

?v=xh_xP_nhAxU&ab_channel=4THSPACEConcordiaUniversity. Nazzal, “Moving the Landscape to Find Ground.”

57 “Rehab Nazzal,” Mónica Reyes Gallery, accessed September 23, 2024, <https://www.monicareyesgallery.com/rehab-nazzal.html>.

58 Nanibush, “About Land,” 106.

59 Nanibush, “About Land,” 106.



/fig. 3/ Rehab Nazzal, image from the series *We the Wild Plants and Fruit Trees*, 2015. Photograph. Courtesy of the artist.



/fig. 4/ Rehab Nazzal, image from the series *We the Wild Plants and Fruit Trees*, 2015. Photograph. Courtesy of the artist.

The collaborative artist duo Basel Abbas and Ruanne Abou-Rahme likewise engage with ecology as a “living archive of Palestinian stories.”⁶⁰ Their film *And yet my mask is powerful (Part 1)* (2016–18), for instance, follows a group of Palestinian youth who return to the sites of villages destroyed in 1948 during the Nakba.⁶¹ As a multi-media video installation, the work adapts to fill a variety of exhibition spaces and is projected across elements such as dried vegetation, planks of wood, 3D-printed replicas of neolithic masks, and fleeting gallery visitors / fig. 5 /. When discussing the work in a recent artist talk, Abou-Rahme emphasized that it is specifically the native flora that the youth encounter that reveals the locations of these village sites, as the severity of their destruction has rendered them nearly unrecognizable.⁶² The youth in Abou-Rahme and Abbas’s film are thus guided by fennel, thistles, and almond and pomegranate trees, a journey that reflects Nazzal’s own process of identifying the ecological traces of razed villages, emphasizing the vitality at these sites of wreckage and dispossession. Returning to the sabr, for example, Abbas and Abou-Rahme recognize these plants as active agents who hold the stories of the land, despite the occupation’s attempts to remove them. Media scholar Farah Atoui argues that, in this way, they act as “both a living material evidence of these villages, and an index of the colonial violence inflicted upon them, becom[ing] a medium through which Palestinian history, memory and presence are conjured.”⁶³

Later in their artist talk, Abou-Rahme drew a connection between ecological archives and settler-colonial operations that seek to frame Palestinian life and ecology as stagnant and part of a distant past, arguing that it is “colonization [that] tries to fossilize time.”⁶⁴ Such framing is especially relevant when considering that these installations are a direct response to a 2014 exhibition hosted by the Israel Museum in Jerusalem entitled *Face to Face: The Oldest Masks in the World*, which displayed neolithic masks taken from what the museum referred to as Judean Hills and the Judean Desert.⁶⁵ Known by their Arabic placenames of Jibal Al Khalil and El Bariyah, the museum’s use of biblical terms to refer to these locations is an example of how cultural institutions play an active role in upholding the state of Israel’s co-opting of the land. This endorsement, Atoui explains, “exposes the museum’s active role in the broader and systemic colonial campaign of writing Palestinians out of the history of the land.”⁶⁶ Abbas and Abou-Rahme challenge the museum’s participation in contextual erasure by using ecological archives as a “counter-visual” language, “unbound from colonial time, space, and narrative.”⁶⁷ Embracing vegetation as a counter-visual language offers an alternative framing to colonial narratives that seek to rewrite and erase the stories of the land. As active agents, these living archives disrupt Zionist claims of “a land without a people for a people without a land” by keeping the memories of the villages’ inhabitants rooted in place.

These experiences of systemic erasure and violent dispossession shared by Palestinians are also well known to Indigenous peoples across Turtle Island. Anishinaabe artist Rebecca Belmore’s 1991 *Ayum-ee-aawach Oomama-mowan: Speaking to Their Mother* is one example of work created by Indigenous artists that counter the Canadian settler-colonial project / fig. 6 /. The large wooden cone-shaped structure, wrapped in hide, adorned with Anishinaabe painted florals and attached to a loudhailer at the tapered end, was created in response to the 1990 Kanehsatà:ke Resistance or “Oka

60 Farah Atoui, “Return, Recollect, Imagine: Decolonizing Images, Reclaiming Palestine,” *Postcolonial Directions in Education* 9, no. 1 (June 2020): 26.

61 The sites of the villages are not specified by the artists.

62 Abbas and Abou-Rahme shared these insights during a question and answer period as part of the film screening event “boundless

returns,” hosted at Centre A, Vancouver, on November 23rd, 2024.

63 Atoui, “Return, Recollect, Imagine,” 27.

64 Atoui, “Return, Recollect, Imagine,” 27.

65 Atoui, “Return, Recollect, Imagine,” 41.

66 Atoui, “Return, Recollect, Imagine,” 31.

67 Atoui, “Return, Recollect, Imagine,” 8.



/fig. 5/ Basel Abbas and Ruanne Abou-Rahme, *And yet my mask is powerful (part 1)*, 2016. Film still. Courtesy of the artists.



/fig. 6/ Rebecca Belmore, *Ayum-ee-aawach Oomama-mowan: Speaking to Their Mother*, 1991. Sound installation, wood, megaphone. Various locations within Canada and the United States of America, collection of the Walter Phillips Gallery, Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity. Photo: Dennis Ha, courtesy of the Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver.

Crisis.” Beginning on July 11, 1990, and lasting for seventy-eight days, the Kanien'kehá:ka of Kanehsatà:ke, near the municipality of Oka, defended their land against plans to build a golf course on top of sacred burial grounds. At the request of Québec's premier, Robert Bourassa, the Canadian Armed Forces, equipped with several armoured tanks, were called in to put an end to the resistance.⁶⁸ News about the resistance circulated across the world, garnering awareness and solidarity for ongoing Indigenous struggles for land rights and sovereignty. Since its creation, *Ayum-ee-aawach Oomama-mowan: Speaking to Their Mother* continues to travel to blockades, national parks, reserves, waterways and forests and inviting people to interact with the work in the way it is intended: to speak to their mother.⁶⁹ While the work prompts us to consider resistance, it also offers an uninterrupted space for participants to build a connection with the ecosystems with which they are intimately in relation. In this way, our mother encompasses all of the natural world – not just the land, but also the water, the air, the celestial world, plant and animal nations, and human nations. For Anishinaabeg, these longstanding relationships teach us that internationalism is the foundation for life, and therefore, tending to these relationships is crucial for our collective liberation.⁷⁰ By uniting Palestinians and Indigenous Peoples across Turtle Island through our respective knowledge systems, which are informed by longstanding ecological archives, rather than resting solely on our shared experiences of settler-colonialism, we can envision possibilities for futures where all beings thrive.

LENS-BASED DOCUMENTATION AGAINST CENSORSHIP

While the act of re-inhabiting sites of displacement through lens-based documentation does not completely resolve the physical dislocations experienced by Palestinians, these efforts significantly contribute to a living archive of Palestinian presence, countering Israel's nation-building project. The power of lens-based documentation is evident given how it has been met with censorship and overt violence by the Israeli occupation and its supporters abroad. Nazzal and others' documentation of these histories thus becomes a vital expression of Palestinian resistance. Nazzal's art practice did not always include lens-based media but initially focused on painting and drawing. Reflecting on this shift in her 2023 book, *Driving in Palestine*, Nazzal explains how she sees photography as a means to reduce the subjective possibility for the viewer by presenting more direct records of the mass destruction she witnessed while travelling across her homelands.⁷¹ At the same time, Nazzal highlights how photography has also been deployed by “the settler-colonial project... [to map] the country during the British mandate of Palestine... Zionist photographers used to photograph Palestine as tourists, aerial photography, as well as each town, each community.”⁷² While photography is used as a tool of surveillance and control, as we will see, Nazzal's efforts have been targeted in both Israel and Canada. Nazzal's practice is situated in a lineage of Palestinian photographers who have utilized the medium to disprove colonial erasure by chronicling their lives. As scholars Chandni Desai and Rula Shahwan explain, the use of photography to document daily life in Palestine began in the late nineteenth century and by the late 1940s transformed into a wider practice of photojournalism sparked by Palestinian resistance to the Nakba.⁷³ In *Canada Park*, archival

68 There are numerous references that discuss the Kanehsatà:ke Resistance (Oka Crisis). For those wanting to learn more, we recommend Audra Simpson and Faye D. Ginsburg's article, “The Oka Crisis: The Power of a Woman with a Movie Camera,” in *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 13, no. 3 (2023): 704–15.

69 Gabrielle L'Hirondelle Hill and Sophie McCall, “Introduction,” in *The Land We Are*, ed. Gabrielle L'Hirondelle Hill and Sophie McCall (Winnipeg: Arp Books, 2016), 1.

70 Simpson, *As We Have Always Done*, 56.

71 Nazzal, “Driving in Palestine.”

72 Nazzal, “Driving in Palestine.”

73 Chandni Desai and Rula Shahwan, “Preserving Palestine: Visual Archives, Erased Curriculum, and Counter-Archiving amid Archival Violence in the Post-Oslo Period,” *Curriculum Inquiry* 52, no. 4 (2022): 470.

photographs attest to this form of record-keeping. The pre-1967 images, depicting cityscapes, including homes, bridges, wells, and agricultural fields, provide visual evidence of what existed before villages were razed and reduced to the fragments that can be seen in Nazzal's contemporary photographs.

The existence of these photographs contest settler-colonial attempts to reduce the villages to brief chapters in the past, participating in what can be regarded as a counter-archive. Art historian May Chew defines counter-archival practices by their dependence "on alternate networks of care and relationality... [as] counter and amateur archives can bypass official archival structures and travel along divergent routes of care and stewardship, with family and community members often becoming inadvertent archivists whose labours enable the records' survival."⁷⁴ Wanda Nanibush discusses a similar process used by Indigenous photographers across Turtle Island as "creating spaces of visual sovereignty."⁷⁵ This concept can be understood as a pictorial realm where Indigenous artists control how our/their respective cultures are represented and "assert a continued presence on the land, despite centuries of theft and removal."⁷⁶ Nazzal's documentation is increasingly vital as we bear witness to the attack on every university and archival centre in Gaza since October 2023.⁷⁷ This strategic targeting is neither new nor exceptional. As Desai explains, "through the physical destruction of educational and cultural infrastructure, scholasticide obliterates the means through which a group, in this instance Palestinians, can sustain and transmit their culture, knowledge, history, memory, identity and values across time and space. It is a key feature of genocide."⁷⁸ For Nazzal, too, Zionist censorship and physical violence have played a long and insidious role in attempting to devalue and limit the visibility of her artistic practice, both in Palestine and so-called Canada.

Efforts to censor Nazzal's 2014 exhibition *Invisible*, held at the Karsh-Masson Gallery in Ottawa, reflect the increased pressure applied to cultural organizations by Zionist lobby groups. Composed of a series of video works and photographic prints, the exhibition focused on "largely silenced and obscured narratives of human rights violations in occupied Palestine. Particularly, Israel's extrajudicial assassination of Palestinian intellectuals, leaders, and activists."⁷⁹ Two weeks following the opening of *Invisible*, the Israeli ambassador to Canada, Rafael Barak, accompanied by pro-Israel lobby groups, attempted to have its contents censored.⁸⁰ This onslaught of threats and intimidation continued for several weeks, prompting responses from the Mayor of Ottawa, Jim Watson, who defended Nazzal's right to freedom of expression. Unveiling the pervasiveness of Zionist sensitivities in Canadian politics, the dispute escalated to the federal government, with the then Minister of State for Democratic Reform, Pierre Poilievre, condemning the exhibition in the Canadian Parliament for its "appalling celebration of terrorism."⁸¹ Despite this response, the exhibition remained open for its originally intended duration, garnering vast media attention. In Nazzal's words, "[*Invisible*'s] presence...left a legacy—the message that art cannot be circumscribed by colonial state power or by political pressure groups, and that significant art is indispensable, especially in times of injustice."⁸²

74 May Chew, "Diasporic Archives and Hauntological Accretions," *Frames Cinema Journal*, no. 19 (March 2022): 136.

75 Wanda Nanibush, "Notions of Land," *Aperture* (Spring 2019), 74, <https://issues.aperture.org/article/2019/1/1/wanda-nanibush-notions-of-land>.

76 Nanibush, "Notions of Land," 77.

77 Chandni Desai, "Israel Has Destroyed or Damaged 80% of Schools in Gaza. This Is Scholasticide," *The Guardian*, June 8, 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/article/2024/jun/08/israel-destroying-schools-scholasticide#:~:text=In%20the%20latest%20war%2C%20outlined,to%20total%20annihilation%20of%20education.&text=In%20the%20first%20100%20days,and%20wholly%20or%20partly%20destroyed>.

78 Desai, "Israel Has Destroyed or Damaged 80% of Schools in Gaza."

79 Nazzal, "Critical Art and Censorship."

80 Nazzal, "Critical Art and Censorship."

81 Nazzal, "Critical Art and Censorship"; Andrew Nguyen, "Poilievre Joins Those Condemning Controversial City Hall Art Exhibit," *Ottawa Citizen*, June 4, 2014, <https://ottawacitizen.com/news/local-news/poilievre-joins-those-condemning-controversial-city-hall-art-exhibit>. To read more about Zionism's entanglement in Canadian politics, see Yves Engler, "Zionism is Part of Canada's Political Fabric," *The Electronic Intifada*, January 7, 2014, <https://electronicintifada.net/content/zionism-part-canadas-political-fabric/13062>.

82 Nazzal, "Critical Art and Censorship."



/ fig. 7 / Rehab Nazzal, *The last photograph my lens captured showing the Israeli sniper who shot me, on the ground of Jacir's Hotel entrance*, December 11, 2015. Photograph. Courtesy of the artist.

Three years after *Invisible*, Nazzal's exhibition at Western University's McIntosh Gallery, *Choreographies of Resistance*, faced identical threats of censorship.⁸³ The works in this show were created following Nazzal's return to Palestine in 2015–2016 when a third Intifada erupted and Nazzal became witness to the IOF's violent response, resulting in the murder of over 300 unarmed civilians. While documenting these events, Nazzal was shot by an Israeli sniper as she recorded a military "truck that was spraying... lab-made sewage onto Palestinian homes and workplaces in Bethlehem."⁸⁴ In Nazzal's footage, an armoured vehicle is parked on a street covered in debris, while several soldiers can be seen on the opposite side of the road / fig. 7 /. One of the soldiers stands near the truck with his back turned towards the camera as two others crouch on the ground behind a low stone wall, one of whom aims his gun at Nazzal. Titled *The last photograph my lens captured showing the Israeli sniper who shot me, on the ground of Jacir's Hotel entrance*, this image presents viewers with the raw and visceral experience of Palestinians resisting Israeli occupation.

CONCLUSION

We echo Palestinian calls for accountability and urge Canada to cease its support of the Zionist project, its propaganda, and the attacks on cultural workers across Turtle Island. We witnessed the range of this censorship in the Canadian arts sphere when Anishnaabe curator Wanda Nanibush abruptly departed her position as inaugural Curator of Indigenous Art at the Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO) in November 2023.⁸⁵ Following her exit, it was revealed that Nanibush, who has been publicly vocal in her support for a Free Palestine, was scrutinized in a leaked email sent to the AGO by the Israel Museum and Arts, Canada (IMAAAC) in October 2023.⁸⁶ In open letters published in 2023 and 2024, addressed to AGO Director and CEO Stephen Jost and the AGO Board of Trustees, the Indigenous Curatorial Collective (ICCA) rightfully point

83 Nazzal, "Critical Art and Censorship."

84 Nazzal, "Critical Art and Censorship."

85 As of December 2025, there has been no official statement, from Nanibush or the AGO that would explain the reason for her departure.

86 Maya Pontone, "Questions Arise as Indigenous Curator Suddenly Departs Toronto Museum," *Hyperallergic*, November 21, 2023, <https://hyperallergic.com/857994/questions-arise-as-indigenous-curator-wanda-nanibush-suddenly-departs-toronto-art-gallery-of-ontario/>.

out how the silencing of an Anishinaabe woman, on Anishinaabe homelands, calls into question the AGO's dedication to reconciliation, decolonization, and Indigenization.⁸⁷ The ICCA argues that this censorship impacts more than just the Indigenous arts community but wider "racialized arts communities...who have all been impacted by these events."⁸⁸

As a Palestinian-Canadian artist, Nazzal has also been subjected to censorship and violence both in Canada and abroad. Despite repeated attempts to silence her, she continues to document the destruction and steadfastness of people and plants across Palestine. While the JNF continues to deny their complicity in colonial violence, Nazzal's inclusion of testimony in *Canada Park* unveils how JNF's environmental and recreational projects are complicit in the dispossession, erasure, and prevention of the return of Palestinians. A final interview with Abu Goush recounts a 2009 event held in Ramallah to commemorate the anniversary of the villages' destruction where he spoke with an unspecified "Canadian representative" about the moral and tangible responsibility that Canada must answer to:

Our demand was not only to inform the Canadian authorities, but, rather, to call for an inquiry into the financing of colonial projects built over the ruins of other peoples' lives. And not only ending the financial support of groups that conduct such activities, but also investigating these acts and holding accountable those responsible.

As we follow how Canadian charities, such as JNF Canada, are involved in the histories and present realities that Nazzal addresses in *Canada Park*, we are reminded of how oral histories, documentation, and ecology hold the stories of the land. By archiving these testimonies in the scope of her practice, Nazzal continues to chip away at the fissures in Israel's colonial project to completely erase Palestinian livelihoods.

In the final minutes of *Canada Park*, Nazzal returns to archival photographs of Imwas, Beit Nuba, and Yalu before 1967. Three final black-and-white images fade in and out of each other, illustrating life in the villages prior to the violence of the Naksa. Despite the Zionist framing of "neglected," "exploited," "uncivilized" landscapes, these images provide visual evidence of the longstanding infrastructure Nazzal recalls in the opening sequence of the film. In the final image, at the bottom of the screen, a line of shadowy figures appear to be congregating amongst the stone buildings and plant life that surround them. As settler-colonial governments continue to implement land theft, dehumanization, and erasure tactics against the land's original inhabitants, we look to contemporary artists, including Nazzal, who remind us that these deep relationships between Indigenous peoples and their lands will never be severed by colonial regimes. Despite the violence, the land remembers and the plants continue to grow.

87 Indigenous Curatorial Collective, "Let Wanda Speak," Indigenous Curatorial Collective, June 4, 2024, <https://icca.art/let-wanda-speak/>.

88 Indigenous Curatorial Collective, "Let Wanda Speak."